The Comanches

854 right or wrong, as we understand them, the Comanches knew little or nothing. The approach to life was pragmatic. The child was not coaxed toward good with the hope of Heaven as a reward or frightened from evil by the fear of Hell as a punishment. Instead, he was shown by word and example that the respect and approbation of his fellow tribesmen were to be desired, and their condemnation and contempt were to be dreaded and avoided. He saw that the men who were brave and generous were applauded and respected. In Comanche
854 society it was impossible to live a secluded life. The members were
626 aware of the conduct of each person. Each was eager for the approval of his fellows and greedy for their praise, and public opinion promised the reward he hoped for and threatened the punishment he feared—lack of esteem among The People. This was their method of control.

861 The Comanches did not whip or otherwise bodily punish their children but directed them by persuasion and object lessons. However, they were, at times, frightened by threats. Breaks Something, when a small boy, annoyed his mother by whining for some mush she was making. She called in an elder classificatory sister, who simply dragged him into the tipi with a rawhide strap around his neck and threatened to hang him to the top of the tipi if he was not good. "I was really scared."

Discipline within the family usually devolved on an older sister—real or, preferably, putative—and youngsters really resented their bossiness. The Comanches knew nothing about Freud and his theory of the Oedipus complex, but they did know that parental dominance breeds resentment, and so, like most American Indians, when forceful discipline was called for, they turned the job over to a relative outside of the immediate conjugal family or to an imaginary bogeyman.

Old people covered their heads with a sheet to give a ghost scare to bad little boys and girls, and all youngsters had the fear put into them of *piamɜmpits*, Big Cannibal Owl, the mythological creature who lived in a cave on the south side of the Wichita Mountains and ate bad children at night.

● 857 As soon as she was large enough to walk, the girl followed her mother everywhere about the camp. She imitated her in all things,

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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playing at the tasks which her mother performed. She was given a doll, dressed usually in deer skin, which she took everywhere with her. She might be lucky enough to have a toy cradle and carry her doll on her back in the fashion of her mother. As she grew older, she learned to dress and undress her doll and to make for it the necessary articles of clothing. Little girls learned to ride almost by the time they were able to sit astride a horse and hold the reins. Although they never spent as much time as the boys in practice, they became good horsewomen, so proficient that often the white campaigner was unable in the midst of battle to distinguish men from women.

There was a very close relationship between a girl and her mother's sisters. They were not called aunt, but *pia,* "mother," and the relationship was that of a mother to her daughter. A woman called her sister's child her own and aided in its instruction. There was even less formality between a girl and her mother's sister than between the girl and her mother. It was the grandparents who spoiled the child. The maternal grandmother was the girl's favorite. She was called *kaku* and she in reciprocity called her daughter's children *kaku,* too. Their social positions were theoretically equivalent. The *kaku* was likely to be congenial and indulgent with the child, and the relationship was much more intimate than between mother and daughter.[4]

As a girl grew older, she was given small tasks. She was first required to carry water and, when still older, she began to go for wood. Parties of girls, sometimes accompanied by a few women, went out from camp to bring in the wood. They also went with the women to gather wild fruits, roots, and nuts. At about twelve years of age, the girl began to learn to cut out moccasins, to cook, to dress hides, to make and set up a tipi—all the things essential for becoming the wife of a warrior.

The passage of a girl from childhood to young womanhood was an important occasion in her life, and was hardly less so to her family and the tribe. But since there was little anxiety about becoming a woman and a girl was already well-prepared for womanhood, and since the Comanches were a work-a-day, unceremonious people, there were no puberty rites. Among well-to-do families the event was the

[4] For a detailed analysis of Comanche kinship relations and terminology see, Hoebel, "Comanche and Hekandika Shoshone Relationship Systems," *loc. cit.,* 440–57.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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that the boy would need to know. The maternal grandparent was the boy's favorite, and each called the other *tɔk*. 868 603

After the grandfather, those next most likely to manifest interest in instructing the boy were his father, elder brother, and father's brothers, who were called "father," *apʻ*. With the mother's brother, who was called *ata*, "uncle," less formal respect was customary, for the *ata* and the boy were on a footing of easygoing comradeship. A boy could borrow his *ata's* goods without asking, and he could count on his *ata's* aid if he got into a scrape. The uncle, also, in reciprocity, addressed his sister's son as *ata*. A man called a brother's child his own[5] and addressed it as "son" or "daughter." 868 604

After the boy had received his bow and had been instructed in its use, he spent much time in practice. As he improved in skill, he hunted small birds with other little fellows of his age; and as he grew older, he ranged farther and farther from camp in search of larger game. He learned that hunting was not merely for pleasure but was serious work, that his ability as a hunter might mean the difference between food, shelter, and clothing and starvation and exposure. He was encouraged to become a good hunter, and when successful, he received the coveted praise. His first great kill was celebrated as an important event in his life. 868

He learned to approach game with patience, caution, and quietness; learned to take advantage of vegetation, of physical features, and of the wind; learned how to make a surround—lessons which would be valuable in real hunts when he grew up. He came to understand the signs of the prairie, how to observe the habits of wild animals, to know where they might be found, and how they reacted under different conditions.

A boy was allowed much liberty, and although his parents were firm, he was seldom scolded or punished. He was not expected to perform any menial labor about the camp and was always treated with great consideration, for "he is going to be a warrior and he may die young in battle." 858

The Comanche boy in his daily life was learning to be self-reliant, but at the same time his play habits were fostering manly comradery. Most of the daytime hours of the pre-adolescent boys were 857

[5] Informant: Medicine Woman.

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857 spent in gang play. When a new camp was set up, they set out to find a good water hole in the creek where they could play all day. Following and baiting small birds and large insects fascinated them. 411 224 Hummingbirds were shot with headless arrows having a vertically split foreshaft in which to catch the birds. Boys would spend all day chasing one bird, according to Skinny and Wrinkled, in a kind of concentration that boded well for the future hunter and tracker of men and beasts. Bull bats were shot with arrows having horizontally split foreshafts. Grasshoppers were shot with hummingbird arrows, and their hind legs were eaten for lunch.

The boys had great fun by tying two grasshoppers together with a short thread and then crowding about to watch them "wrestle." They would jump and jerk each other up short. The one that first fell on its back was the loser. They liked to catch "shit rollers," tie a piece of straw to a leg, and watch them fly, running fleetly after them as they followed their courses. They would stick a small straw up the anus of a horsefly and turn the insect loose—which perhaps showed how they felt about horseflies.

Small boys, who had no real arrows, made them of reed shafts with grasshopper legs for points and a ballast daub of mud stuck two inches from the point. They killed night hawks with slings and amused themselves playing with whirrers—two strings attached to a bone and pulled taut to make a whirring noise.

Although boys were by themselves most of the time, the younger ones now and then joined the little girls to play camp. On the sand by the creek they built small windbreaks and arbors. A play group leader was made "chief," and each boy chose a wife or wives. They all swam in the creek, gathered in ponies with the girls, and rode together. Some time was spent by the boys in hunting squirrels to bring into camp for their "wives" to cook, while the girls gathered berries, edible roots, and the eggs of turkeys, ducks, quail, and prairie chickens. All this swag made for good make-believe feasts.

836 The more precocious dallied in sexual experimentation. "One day we played at being married. I did my best to make a baby with my wife," said Post Oak Jim.

857 526 When younger boys and girls played together (but not when they were playing camp), there were several forms of joint games.

3:Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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A hilarious favorite was "grizzly bear." For this, a mound of sand, called the "sugar," was fashioned. Then one child was dragged around by his heels to smooth a circle around the "sugar." Outside the circle all the children formed a queue, holding to each others' waists and facing the mound. The leader was the "mother" protecting her young from the "grizzly," who was played by a child inside the circle. His part was to reach out of the circle and seize a child, but the mother protected the children by swinging the line back and forth. At last one child was caught and subjected to the penalty of being tickled ("eaten") by the bear in the circle. After that, players would break out of the line and try to dash in to steal some "sugar" from the grizzly's store and get out without his catching them. As each was caught, he was tickled, and the game went on until the "sugar" was all stolen or all the children were captured.

In another group game the children all sat in a row with their feet straight out in front of them. An old man had to join them in the fun. He would advance with closed eyes and feel up and down the row until he decided to choose one child. This one he picked up by the feet, head hanging down over his back, and carried him around in a circle back to the row. The other children asked the "It" many questions: "Do you have a horse, a saddle, a belt, etc?" The given answer was always "Yes." At last they rushed forward and took their playmate off the old man's back, crying that they were going to eat the old man. So they tickled the old fellow with joyous cries.

Other times they took pieces of old hide to the tops of hills. While some of the children rode on the hides, the others pulled them bouncing down with ropes. "Guess over the hill" (*nanip'ka*) was another favorite. Two older boys would organize the game. The boy who was "It" went over the hill; another stood guard at the top to make sure he did not spy while the other children hid under robes or blankets. When called by the guard, "It" came and tried to guess the names of the hiders.[6]

On rainy days all was still; the children lay quietly at home in their family tipis, for they were superstitiously afraid of thunder and lightning. Winter was the time for the telling of stories; not summer.

[6] Informant: Post Oak Jim.

9: Gladwin E-5 (1940) 1948 NO6 Comanche NO6

593 extent of opposite sex, is considered to be one of the closest. It is often said that his brothers are more dear to a man than his wife, and this is given as the reason why a man shares his wife with his younger brothers in a polyandrous [837] household. Men often leave their wives with their brothers when they go off on war-parties, and most people take it for granted that the brother will sleep with her during this time. Damage claims for wife stealing are practically never made upon brothers. It is a brother relationship to which the closest friends aspire, and they will often call each others' families by terms appropriate to this relation. Sisters, on the other hand, form the most desirable [595] combination of wives if a man is to have several, for they get along better together than any other women, and are less likely to be jealous.

[554] The oldest brother has much greater prestige than any of the others, unless he should be a complete coward and failure and have a spectacularly successful younger brother. His position is unique, for, unless he should die very young, his removal through death or moving away will not lead to the elevation of the next oldest brother to a position of special prestige. In this society of warriors, boys from puberty onward are always considered greatly superior to their sisters.

Relations between brothers and sisters are highly variable, and depend greatly upon the personalities of the individuals. The ideal picture is one of fondness and mutual help and kindness. Brothers bring their sisters horses when they return from raids, and will take their side and protect them in case of trouble; they frequently leave their wives with their sisters who will act as chaperones while they are away. A sister will care for her brother's horse when he comes in and perform many minor services for him; she may act as a messenger for an unmarried brother in arranging nocturnal trysts. But these and many other expressions of esteem and affection are only evident if they like each other.

[857] The other side of the picture reveals the fact that the oldest sibling present [576] is the boss of the others until they come of age. As the boys used to go out on war-parties as soon as they were old enough, this was usually an older sister. [195] She frequently whipped her brothers as a disciplinary measure, and often delighted in teasing them in various more or less nasty ways. The word *ii'rii?aiwapi*, "slave," could be applied by an older sibling to a younger, though this was considered being particularly unpleasant, and nice children did not do it! It is significant that while it was presumably permissible, this appellation [605] was rarely if ever used between siblings of the same sex. It is emphatically stated, incidentally, that this was never applied to cousins except as a joke.

593 Once a boy passed puberty, he usually went out on the warpath, and was therefore in imminent danger of being killed. For this reason, it is said, one 882 should let him have his way in all things. The boys do not seem to have been beyond capitalizing on this, and could and occasionally would whip their sisters even after they were married. It was the brother, more than anyone else, who

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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These young Indians had
spent less time on horseback and more time inside, out of the weather; nor had they ever ridden the war trails. The women of this group took better care of their hair. The older women's hair generally had an untidy look.

This sullen aloofness and aimless drifting didn't affect the younger children—it seemed to set in when a boy got to be fifteen or sixteen years old. The younger children, when they arrived home on vacation, were bursting with energy. They rode their ponies helter-skelter over the prairies and rivaled the channel cat in Cache Creek with their cavorting, swimming, and diving.

They came to town with their parents—the girls riding in a hack or the little lumber wagon with the women. If it was the wagon, the bows and canvas cover converted it into a little prairie schooner. On a nice day the canvas would be rolled up a ways on either side, to let the air through.

Comanche men and boys never rode in the wagon or hack with the women. The boys would be riding along with their father, horseback. If there were not enough stock saddles to go around, the younger boys would be riding ancient Mexican-type saddles. These Mexican saddles had a flat look, compared to the up-to-date stock saddle. Neither the fork nor the cantle was as high, while the seat was broader. Its most distinguishing feature was the top of the fork. Thin, broad, and round, it made one think of a pancake. I am sure the tops of some of the horns were as much as four inches across.

Somehow, the youngsters always had a few nickels to spend for candy, cakes, and wax—their name for all kinds of chewing gum. The happy parents stood around and glowed in their pride. Sometimes the parents had one of the youngsters show off—they would have one of the boys interpret as they bought their groceries or other store items. They wanted everyone in the store to see how much their children had learned.

But all this youthful, happy exuberance suddenly vanished in the late teens. Few of the girls stayed in school as long as the boys, and the girls never got the good from their Carlisle clothes. About the second or third time they came to the store after their last year in school, they would buy some gay-colored, patterned calico along with matching cotton braid. The next time you saw them, they would be wearing a *pit-si-qui-na*.

The young men did wear out their white man's clothes, but seem-

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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set of tepee poles, twenty-two in number, left from the old days. Now they were covered with canvas.

The government had built a small box house, generally fourteen by twenty-eight feet, at most family camps, but it could hardly accommodate the multiple-wife family, still in vogue. Mostly it was the camp's storage house, an out-of-the-weather place for saddles, harness, horse feed and medicine, and the women's sewing machine.

I almost never knew one of the Carlisle Comanches, man or boy, to take a job. There were riding jobs on the ranches, and many merchants would have been glad to hire a Comanche clerk. Old Indians with horse herds were forced to hire white broncobusters to break their horses. I asked an Indian father once, in my ignorance, why he was paying to have his horses ridden, and added the naïve qestion, "Don't your boys like to break horses to ride?" In our Scottish household I had never heard the words tact and diplomacy.

The old fellow gave a snort of disgust and replied, partly in sign language and partly in words, "They more like riding sitting-down-walking," that is to say, riding a bicycle.

The question had been crude on my part, and I should have been pulled up short for my brashness. But I was all excited, thinking what a wonderful lot of fun it would be to gentle and ride those ponies. I had actually helped do it on the farm with wild horses from Oregon. I knew there was a better way to break a horse to ride than to throw a saddle on a wild horse, climb on, and spur him until he was exhausted from bucking.

Just a little time spent gentling a horse pays big dividends. Let him wear a saddle while he is tied snugly to a post or in a stall. Then, when you first ride him do not use your spurs. We first taught a horse to lead while wearing a saddle. Then, the first few times we rode him we had someone on a strong, gentle horse keep the wild horse's head snubbed close to the other's saddle horn and lead him.

Indian boys had nothing but time. Tribal custom had been to require no menial tasks from boys as they grew up: "Pretty soon be warrior, may-be-so die." But in the old days, the boy was expected to work with the horses, herd them, learn to train them, and become an expert horseman. From my observations, the Carlisle boys were interested in horses only when they wanted to ride somewhere. Had they seen fit to gentle and break their fathers' horses, they would have had much more salable animals.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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595 462 went about her tasks cheerfully and willingly. Whichever one of the women divided the labor reserved enough for herself so that she was just as busy as the other women.

857 462 The little girls of the family stayed close to the women the day through, and performed tasks suitable for their ages. But the little boys roamed far and wide, never seeming to have any duties except when they were helping their father with the horses.

521 522 462 During group tasks there was always quite a bit of conversation and considerable laughing. In warm weather the women would go to the creek together, select a place in the shade where the water was [296] about six or eight inches deep, and sit in the water on the sandy bot- [124] tom to do the family wash. I never learned what the talk and laughter were about, as I was never able to accumulate a squaw vocabulary.

521 562 609 124 [198] (Comanche women held only the most necessary conversation with any man, Indian or white, other than their own menfolks. And while I was generally able to figure out the subject of the men's conversation and follow its progress, I seldom recognized a word used by the women when they conversed among themselves. At times I was inclined to think they even had a different language.)

595 The same air of camaraderie seemed to prevail whenever the wives were together in a group. I noticed it in the store whenever there was only one family present. Their trading done, the wives would draw 516 [352] their chairs into a group and converse. They never had chairs in their camps, but the women never passed up the several chairs we had in the store—although once in a while some quite old squaw would insist on sitting on the floor. If the chairs were all occupied, the women never hesitated to sit on the floor, and the people trading would walk around them.

595 Wherever you saw a man's wives—in town, on the reservation, or at a celebration—they always formed a group. You would not find one wife in a store and another out on the street. Two or more groups of wives would often chat together in the store or sit together in the shade on the reservation or at a powwow.

595 422 294 One custom which seemed odd to me was that of each wife's having her own sewing machine. The sewing done by the average family was not so extensive that one machine would not easily have sufficed. Yet each wife would have her own—something I had been alerted to look for by an article that had appeared in the *Star* commenting that each of Quanah Parker's wives had her individual sewing machine.